LITERATURE REVIEWS MADE EASY
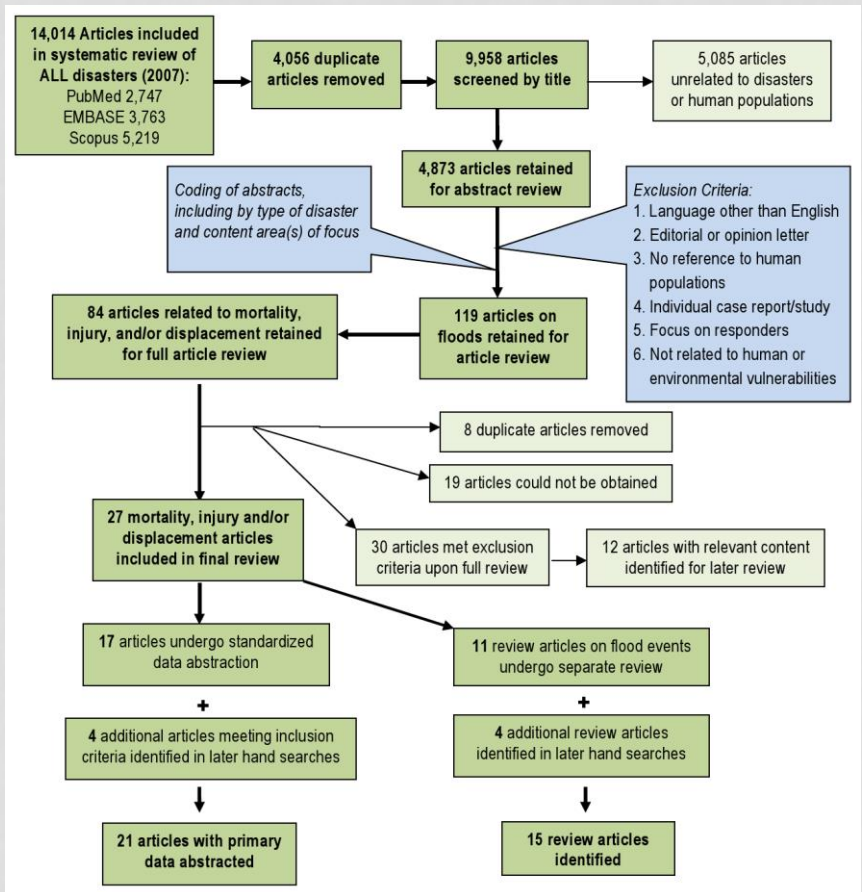
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERIES
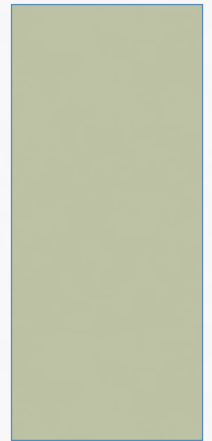
WHERE DO I BEGIN?
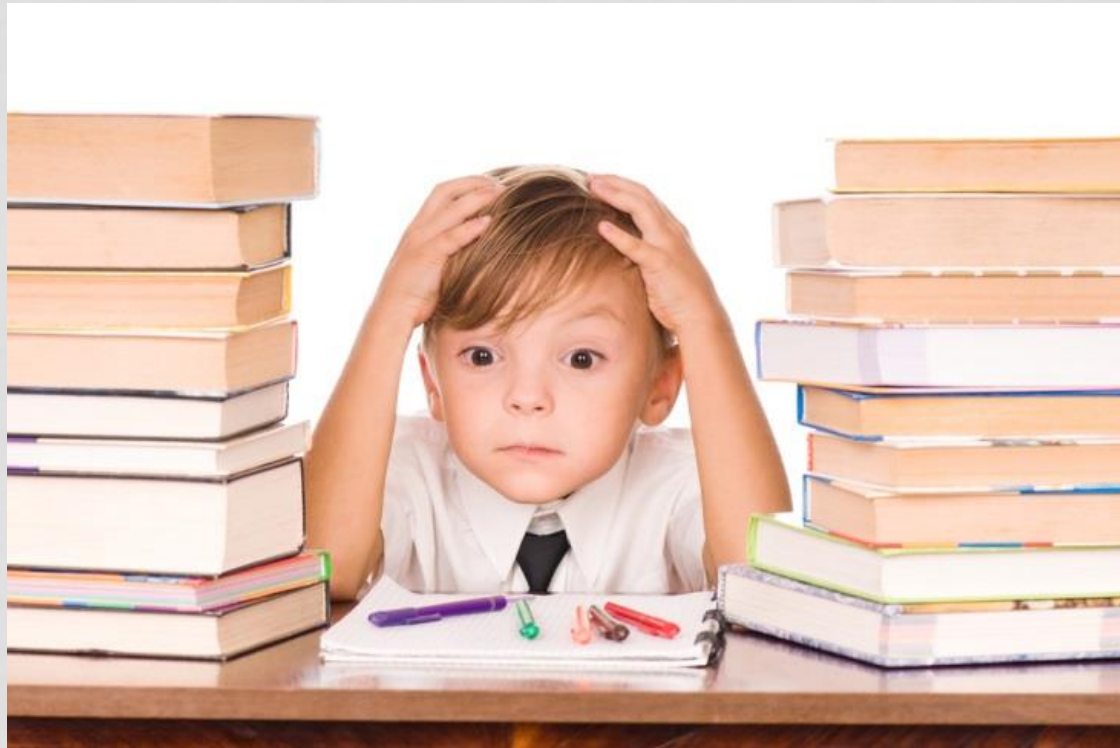
WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

- We will talk about both process

- And product

WHAT IS A LIT REVIEW?

- Definition:

- **A lit review surveys, summarizes, and links information about a given topic.**

- A good lit review **assesses** this information and **distills** it for the reader.

WHAT IS A LIT REVIEW?

- *"The best lit reviews tell a good story." – Regina Winters*

- A lit review provides context and background for your work.
- It's an essay, a synthesis of information relevant to your work.

WHAT DOES A LIT REVIEW DO?

- Clarifies understanding of the field
- Explains the rationale for your research
- Places your research within a broader context
- Evaluates the results of previous research
- Defines key concepts and ideas
- Identifies research in related areas that is generalizable or transferable to your topic
- Identifies relevant methodological issues
- http://www.une.edu.au/library/find/eskillsplus/literature/litreview.php

WHAT A LIT REVIEW IS NOT

- A lit review is NOT an annotated bibliography
- Annotated Bibliographies:
  - Cite various works
  - Summarize major points of those works
  - Talk about the importance of each work to the reader or larger community
  - Discuss gaps in the literature or shortcomings of the works
- Are useful tools
- Are first steps to a good lit review –
- **Don't stop there!**

WHAT'S THE PROCESS?

- Define/refine topic
- Determine approach
- Research effectively
- Read critically
- Analyze and evaluate
- Take great notes
- Be organized
- Draft written product
- Edit and refine

DEFINE/REFINE TOPIC

- What's your current knowledge base?
- Do you know what you don't know? Don't feel bad – that's often the case…
- Do get help!
- This might be an iterative process, but it's easier if you begin focused and with some general knowledge already.

DETERMINE APPROACH

- Develop a set of questions to be applied to all articles
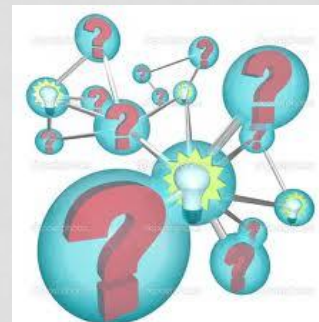- How will you structure your lit review?
  - Chronologically

  - Thematically

  - By relationship to your own work

RESEARCH EFFECTIVELY

- Tabby Farney is your best friend!
- Mine references from sources, look for repetitions and reviews
- Use high quality sources
- Use a variety of sources
- Connect the dots

YOU MAY KISS A LOT OF FROGS

- "When you're gathering information for your lit review, you won't use everything you gather – use the best of the best of the best!" – Regina Winters

ANALYZE AND EVALUATE

- What is your research question and how does this material relate?
- Are there foundational articles/seminal works which must be included?
- How is the topic framed?
- Are there fringe works that should not be included?
- Is there a central debate that should be acknowledged and addressed?
- Where is the topic headed in the future?

READ CRITICALLY

- What is the source, the claim, and the conclusions of the material?
  - Perspective and/or bias
  - Reason(s) for publishing
  - Significance of findings
- What are the assumptions and evidence?
- Is the methodology valid?
  - Flawed reasoning or fallacies
  - Alternative explanations
  - Omissions
- How does it relate?
- What does it mean?

TAKE GREAT NOTES

- Highlighting is good for skimming
- Margin notes suggest your analysis and connections of material
- Outlines may be useful for complex or important works
- Spreadsheets or grids help track numerous sources across consistent variables or metrics
- Checklists help track progress and connections
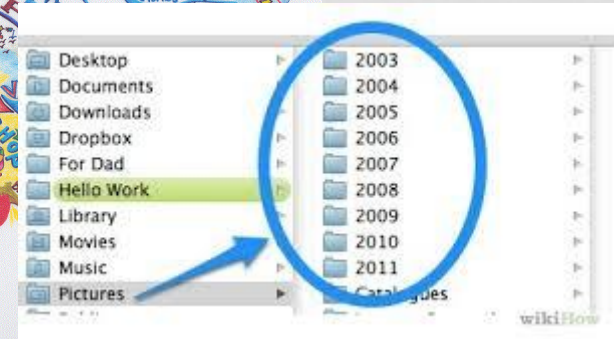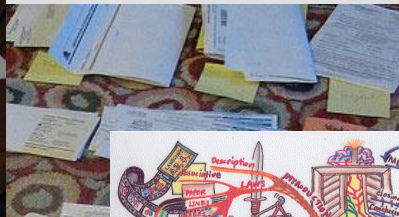- Summaries with additional notes from your own analysis and processing – and written in your own words – help cut down transaction costs when reading and reviewing many sources

TRACK INFORMATION CONSISTENTLY

BE ORGANIZED

DRAFT WRITTEN PRODUCT

- A list of **who said what** is the starting point, not the final product
- Tell the story, make your case
- Use your own words
- Write to your audience
- Make connections for your readers
- Cite accurately

- *"A lit review should provide a conceptual framework." – Dean Schwartz*

CONSTRUCTING THE PRODUCT

- Introduction
  - Topic and importance
    - Use facts
    - History and/or background
  - Narrows topic
  - Talks about implications
  - What will this section say?
  - How will you say it?

CONSTRUCTING THE PRODUCT

- Sections help with navigation
  - Start by painting the big picture by theme
  - Discuss aspects using works
    - Start with large or important works
    - Discuss more detailed studies as needed and appropriate
  - Provide assessment about quality
  - Overall and specific
  - Gaps, new directions, info needed?

EDIT AND REFINE

- Let it sit

- Get outside opinions and assistance

- Don't rush this step

SOME EXAMPLES

Source: Neuman, W. Lawrence. (2003). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 5th ed, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
http://www.rmit.edu.au/library/literaturereview#Exampleofagoodandbadreview

Bad review

Sexual harassment has many consequences. Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt (1983) found that some women students said they avoided taking a class or working with certain professors because of the risk of harassment. They also found that men and women students reacted differently. Their research was a survey of 1,000 men and women graduate and undergraduate students. Benson and Thomson's study in *Social Problems* (1982) lists many problems created by sexual harassment. In their excellent book, *The Lecherous Professor*, Dziech and Weiner (1990) give a long list of difficulties that victims have suffered.

Good review

The victims of sexual harassment suffer a range of consequences, from lowered self-esteem and loss of self-confidence to withdrawal from social interaction, changed career goals, and depression (Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt, 1983; Benson and Thomson, 1982; Dziech and Weiner, 1990). For example, Adams, Kottke, and Padgitt (1983) noted that 13 percent of women students said they avoided taking a class or working with certain professors because of the risk of harassment.

USE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Campus level
  - Writing Center
  - Library
  - Others
- School of Public Affairs
  - Instructors
  - Advisors
  - Call on me – I can help provide direction!
    Pam Sawyer psawyer@uccs.edu

READY TO ROLL!